

Macquarie and the 'Tiger' Who Loved Roses

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Tipu Sultan - Ruler of Mysore State

Lal Bagh (The Red (rose) Garden)

Lachlan Macquarie - the Scotsman who became Governor of New South Wales

What is the connection ?

Tipu (called Tippoo by the British) Sultan was a Muslim king who ruled a part of South India in the late 18th century. He was known by the epithet "Tiger", both for his fighting qualities and his love for the animal - apart from having a number of tigers in his grounds, he loved tiger stripes. His soldiers' uniforms, swords, guns, buildings, the carpets in his palaces, the turbans on his head, all had black and yellow stripes, and to this day the cloth covering his tomb has stripes! He even built a life size mechanical tiger to snap up British soldiers - this toy, which still works, is on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in South Kensington, London, and is a central part of their South Asia gallery.



Tipu 'Tiger' Sultan ~ 18th Century Ruler of Mysore State

The British, who had colonized large parts of India by fighting, quelling and annexing various kingdoms wanted to expand their area of domination by adding the state of Mysore, over which Tipu ruled, and so fought against him from the 1790's onwards.

Lachlan Macquarie (1761-1824) was part of the British Grand Army in the final battle of 1799 when Tipu Sultan was killed. He started his military career in India and belonged to the 77th Regiment, which was a King's regiment of the Bombay Army. It is this same Macquarie who later became Governor of New South Wales in 1809 and did so much to develop that region in the years that he was in charge. Today so many places - islands, lakes, roads and buildings are named for him. Macquarie Bank and Macquarie University have also been named in his honour.



The head of the Lachlan Macquarie Statue that stands in Macquarie Street, Sydney, outside the NSW State Parliament building. Photo courtesy Mr Robin Walsh, Macquarie University Library.

And the Red Garden?

Tipu was very fond of plants, especially roses, and he would build a 'Lal' (which means 'red') 'Bagh' (which means 'garden') wherever he built a palace in his kingdom. He imported plants and seeds from faraway France, Turkey and China. There are murals in his palaces where he is shown holding a rose, even as he sets out for battle, and his summer palace, called Dariya Daulat, in his capital city of Seringapatam, built entirely of teak wood, and which thankfully still exists, has paintings over practically every square inch of wall and ceiling. The friezes over the doorways, the many niches in every wall, indeed the borders surrounding every mural, all have paintings of red, pink or white roses. So beautiful is this building that it is now a heritage site, maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. No photographs are now allowed to be taken. I have seen an old photograph taken

in 1860, now in the British Library archives, which shows the garden of this summer palace with beds of roses.

Tipu built a beautiful mausoleum in Seringapatam where his parents were buried and the huge garden around it abounded in red roses. Another 'Lal Bagh'. Finally he too was laid to rest alongside his parents after he was killed in his final battle with the British in 1799, and in which Lachlan Macquarie, the Scots career soldier took part. Macquarie kept a journal, recording the events on a daily basis for months, indeed years, before the final denouement.

Macquarie wrote, in an earlier journal, kept during the siege of Seringapatam in 1792:

"I rode to see... the Palace, Hyder's (Tipu's father) Tomb and the Garden (called 'the Loll-baug')."



Mural of Tipu Sultan holding a rose while going out to battle with the British



Henry Dixon's photograph, 1860, of the rose beds in front of Dariya Daulat, the Summer Palace

After Tipu was defeated and killed in battle, Arthur Wellesley, who later became the Duke of Wellington, (the duke who fought and vanquished Napoleon) and was the brother of the Governor General of India, Lord Wellesley, and had been present at the final battle against Tipu, liked the summer palace so much, he lived in it for five years from 1799-1804, making sure that all the paintings and murals were in pristine condition and the gardens well maintained. As also the garden in the mausoleum, where Tipu's tomb was covered with tiger skins. And, as mentioned earlier, even today, over 200 years later, the tomb is kept covered with a tiger striped cloth.

What could these red, pink and white roses have been? There was trade between India and China from much before the 1st century C.E., both by sea and by the overland Silk Route. Chinese sailors were known to carry pots of roses to remind them of home, so it is likely many of the old China roses found their way into India from early times. And musk roses entered India with the advent of the Muslims from Persia and other middle eastern regions. Tipu himself, with his love for gardens, had imported plants from many countries. And within India itself, roses have been known from ancient times. The many uses of the species native to the Himalayas have been recorded in ancient medical texts.

This link between India, roses and Australia is fascinating indeed, don't you think?